1: Kroeber E-5 (1901) 1908
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SOCIAL CUSTOMS.

The Gros Ventre system of terms of relationship has been given in a former publication.[1]

Cousins, so far as the relationship was known, were called brothers and sisters, and they called each other's children son or daughter if the cousin was of the same sex as the speaker, or nephew or niece if the cousin was of the opposite sex. Any known relationship was a bar to marriage. The brother of a dead man sometimes married his widow, but this was not always the case.

Large amounts of property, especially horses, were given away for wives for the honor of the act, but there was no rule or definite custom covering the quantity of property so given. The horses might be given not only to the father, but to the brothers, uncles, and other relatives of the girl. Sometimes, without having received any gifts and apparently without any previous understanding, a man would give his daughter to a young man, who thereupon would give him horses, or distribute them among his wife's other relatives. Old men practised this custom in order to obtain the aid and services of a young man in caring for their horses and in other ways, and no doubt sometimes also to insure a more certain food-supply. A young man on marrying received a tent with all the pro[illegible]niture, usually from his prospective parents-in-law, but some[illegible] his own parents, if they were the wealthier.

Although a young married man [illegible]ed with his father-in-law, the well-known taboo custom between [illegible]w and son-in-law — which forbade their speaking, looking at [illegible] being in the same tent — existed among the Gros Ventre. [illegible]ever, no father-in-law taboo. The mother-in-law taboo extend[illegible]n-law's brother.

If a woman did not wish a man for her [illegible]ht send him to do a certain act of bravery. If he returned successf[illegible]war, having accomplished the deed, he was then accepted. This cus[illegible] is said to have led to the death of many young men.

At a person's death his property was inherited generally by his relatives. His father and mother, brothers, sisters, and children would receive part. His father and mother received the most. A man often disposed of his property before his death. If he died suddenly, as on being killed in war, his parents divided his property. It was not customary for a man on going to war to divide his property among his relatives in the contingency of his death. Property particularly valued by the dead person was buried with him.

[1] Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. XVIII, Part I, pp. 9, 180.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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in-law to do anything of the kind for her mother-in-law. So I gave that daughter-in-law two horses."

Although economic obligations were not incumbent, the relationship terms were used, and avoidances practiced, between parents-in-law and the brothers and sisters of the man and wife respectively. It was explained: "The brothers of a man respected his mother-in-law because in the old days it could happen that if a man died his brother might take the wife. And the same with a woman, because they had the custom of giving all the girls in a family to the same man if they liked him."

Siblings of Opposite Sex

Among members of the same generation, the most marked respect was exhibited between siblings of opposite sex, and was extended to include all cousins. There was no relationship term for "cousin," all using sibling terms of address and without distinguishing between parallel- and cross-cousins.

Since a girl was removed from her own family at an early age and was brought up in a different household, actual face-to-face contact between brothers and sisters was slight. Nevertheless, their attitudes toward each other had important consequences with many ramifications. As interpreted by the Gros Ventres, the basic relationship between siblings of opposite sex gave clues to understanding expected behavior in several other categories of kinship, —in the avunculate and amitate, as well as in the relations between in-laws of the same sex and generation.

If it could possibly be avoided, brother and sister did not speak to nor look directly at each other. They communicated through a third person. Gros Ventres, who are today in middle age, explained how embarrassed they were as children when the authorities did not understand "the proper way of doing things." For instance, the good sisters and priests in charge of St Paul's, which at that time was a boarding-school, insisted as a privilege for the boys that they visit their sisters on Sunday afternoons in the girls' part of the school! How deeply this feeling of respect penetrates was brought home to the present author by the following incident. "One day she was with Mary and Coming Daylight, while waiting for Charles Buckman, who was to drive her to another part of the

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842 [787] pressed this desire early in life and volunteered the following story of her experience.

[587] "My first husband, Dressed in White, went out hunting and brought back a lot of buffalo meat. I had my robe spread out just inside the door and he threw all the meat on it. Being hungry, I sat down there and was just about to eat the raw liver when he said: 'Wait! Don't eat that.' When I asked why not, he countered with the query: 'Do you like children?' To which I replied: 'You know I love children. I go wherever there is a baby—I love to have them on my lap.' So he said: 'Well, it is your fault that this is going to happen.' He took the oval piece of meat from the upper front quarter and roasted it in the coals. He then threw it to me in a careless way, instead of passing it to me as usual, and said: 'Here, you can have that for your son. You eat this plain—don't eat any tallow with it.' although they usually ate tallow with such lean meat. I said in disgust: 'E:ka:kya! I have always liked children,' and flung the meat out of the door. He said: 'Now that you have done this, you are going to have children from now on.' So, as he predicted, not long after that I became pregnant with my firstborn who was a boy. Unfortunately this boy died and I often wondered if it happened because I threw the meat too violently on that occasion when my husband had offered me the opportunity to choose whether or not I wished to bear children." Incidentally she remarked many times that she is happy she chose as she did,—otherwise now she would be all alone and her children have been so good to her.

The telling of the above incident brought to Coming Daylight's mind another, which confirms her belief in the relation between [595] "medicine" and conception. "Crow Bull, my mother's brother, had four wives. His first wife did not have any children. Then [582] he married an Assiniboine woman and still later took a third wife. Neither of the latter had children either until one time Crow Bull got mad. His third wife wanted to leave him for another man, but her relatives sent her back to Crow Bull. He, however, slept across from her bed and did not have intercourse with her. Shortly after this the Assiniboine woman did something to displease him and so he made up his mind: [789] 'These two wives of mine are going to have children and settle down!' He had an old-fash-

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CHAPTER IX

MARRIAGE

Polygyny and the Child-bride

The institution of the child-bride, combined with polygyny, was characteristic of Gros Ventre marriage up to about 1880. How far back it was practiced is difficult to say. Our informants who themselves were married off as children of ten or eleven to their first husbands about the year 1865, took the custom for granted and so far as they knew "it had always been that way."[1]

All girls were given in marriage before puberty, and usually as wives to older men with independent households. Because of the disparity in age between husband and child-bride, many of these girls were widowed early and remarriage was quickly arranged for them, even if the widow were not claimed by her husband's brother. Moreover, divorce or separation initiated by the husband was relatively easy and frequent. Consequently the majority of Gros Ventre women knew at least three or four different husbands, and often in fairly rapid succession. Upon successive remarriages the wife's age came to approximate more closely that of her husband.

Young men were not eligible for marriage until about twenty. By that time a young man would have attained proficiency in hunting and have taken the first steps in ceremonial life, being a member of one or other of the two adult men's societies, either the Wolf-men or the Stars. In addition he should have war-deeds to his credit and some property of his own, especially horses stolen from the enemy, in order to qualify as husband. In view of the fact, however, that very young girls were given more often to older already-married men, most young men marrying for the first time had as wife "an older experienced woman." Actually

[1] It was believed that a girl could not menstruate until after she had experienced sexual intercourse. If, therefore, a girl had her first menses before she had been given in marriage, her family would be disgraced.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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582 587 this meant that a young man's first wife was not necessarily "older" in years than he, but that she was "experienced" in marriage, having been either widowed or divorced, perhaps several times.

Only as an exception was a bachelor married to a child-bride. [543] One case of the kind which was recalled concerned a young man who was a "beloved-child" and consequently highly favored by his parents. He however refused to "settle down" when his parents suggested various marriage partners to him, and acceded to their request only when they obtained for him the hand of a young girl who had not previously been married.

582 595 587 Young men just starting their careers were urged to seek as wives among the "older" women, those who were known as "good workers" and who had acquired some property of their own. A wife of this kind could help him become established, and "if he amounted to anything" it would not be long before he could take a second wife, perhaps a younger sister of his first one. Then, as he became more prominent, he would acquire one or two additional wives.[2] To this type of man child-brides usually were given. It was said that an outstanding man had three or four wives at the same time, but conditions were such that he would have had a dozen different ones in the course of his career.

587 595 A man was considered fortunate if he obtained as wife the oldest of several sisters as the chances were great that these others might be offered to him. "If a man married the oldest girl in a family, and her folks liked him and saw that he was a good provider and that he was trying to live right, they would give him the two or three others as they came of age." Many instances were given wherein several sisters were married to the same man. On the other hand it was said that, if a man, who was already married to one or more sisters, asked for another, he might be refused and that "there was nothing he could do about it."

Since the levirate was permitted, it was possible that a man could claim the wife or wives of his deceased brother. This was seemingly carried out infrequently, however, since only two instances could be recalled.[3] Of these two, one involved Coming

[2] For a discussion of the economic basis of polygyny, see pp. 73–74.

[3] "The brother of a dead man sometimes married his widow, but this was not always the case." Kroeber, 1900, p. 150.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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Daylight and her sister, who were married, for a short while after their first husband died, to his classificatory brother. The other concerned an outstanding woman, Woman Chief, who was said to have been so highly valued by her husband's people that "she was kept in his family by marrying her to three brothers [successively]."

Regulations

Marriage was prohibited for those related by blood, no matter how remote the tie. If, however, a couple were in "good faith," so to speak, and it was discovered later on that they were distant kin, it was not considered necessary for them to separate on that account.[4] Affinal relatives were likewise barred as possible marriage partners, except those who were classified as in-laws of the same generation.[5] In other words, the levirate and sororate were permitted, so that any who addressed each other as brother-in-law and sister-in-law respectively were possible mates, but relatives-by-marriage in any other category were prohibited from contracting marriage. The far-reaching effects of this latter regulation can be seen from the following case. "Not so many years ago, a Gros Ventre woman was the subject of a great deal of gossip because she married late in life a man who, many years previously, had for a time been married to a widow of her maternal uncle. People didn't like it and thought she shouldn't have married that man, even though times had changed and the whites wouldn't count them as being related to each other at all."

Arrangements

As a rule, marriage arrangements were made between the husband-to-be and one or other of the bride's male kinsmen,—father, uncle or brother. Either side could take the initiative, but the bride herself was not consulted. Coming Daylight summed up the prevailing attitude in this way: "When I was young, a girl's life was not her own. When a girl was about seven she was sent away from her home to a grandmother or widowed aunt to be

[4] See also the discussion of band affiliation and exogamy, pp. 29–31.
[5] For kinship classification, see pp. 124–25.

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584 trained to do a woman's work. Then when she was ten or eleven
562 she was handed over to some man. They thought that if they gave her to her husband when she was so young she would get attached to him and make him a good wife. The Gros Ventres didn't want a woman to get in the habit of running around with different men, so a woman's folks worried if she was unmarried too long [after being divorced or widowed] because she might do something bad."

587 There is some evidence that as a woman became older, if she had occasion to remarry, she was somewhat more free to express her choice, although presumably a male relative would still be in the position of making the actual decision. It was said that
584 younger men, especially those seeking to marry "older" women,
832 "were afraid of their tongues" and felt more confident of success in possession of "love medicine." Al Chandler, for instance, was offered a love charm which he refused, but the speech of his uncle on that occasion throws some light on a situation of this kind. His uncle had told him: "Now you are a young man and you will be thinking about women. Maybe you want to get married and have picked out a woman and she doesn't want you. Maybe you are not good enough for her and, when you ask her, she will run you down plenty. Some women are swell-heads and can make a man feel cheap. It hurts a fellow to hear things like that—but that is what this charm is for. You take this and keep it in your pocket safely and do not show it to anyone or let anyone know you have it. Now if this woman hurts your feelings, go at night to where she lives and watch carefully, being sure you have the right one. Then when she goes out of the lodge to relieve herself, watch her so you can locate the exact spot. Then open this little packet and dip in it the tip of a little sliver of wood. Go over to the spot and stick the sliver right in the ground on the spot where she urinated and walk away. That is all you have to do, and in a very short time this woman will come running after you. You tell her: 'What are you doing that for? I don't want you.' She will get so anxious that she will beg you to have her."

585 Regardless of whether the man were the suitor, or whether the woman's relatives offered her in marriage, the marriage was validated through presents given by the groom. Traditionally at

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least one horse was included; but no given amount of property was specified nor did bargaining enter into the negotiations.[8] Following the pattern of ostentatious liberality, a man could reflect honor upon himself by giving generously, and one with such a reputation was preferred over a poor or stingy one. Whatever the groom offered was divided among the bride's relatives. As one woman said: "A husband always gave something for his wife, no matter how many wives he acquired, because this is what makes it 'legal.' Then the girl's father and brother divided the presents. If the brother arranged the marriage, he would say to the father 'Here is a horse for you.' And if the father or uncle had been approached by the husband, then they did the same way. Sometimes even the father's sister was given a horse or something else when her niece married."

Although it was not obligatory, a bride's family often provided her with goods to take to her marriage, especially if it were her first one. Singer explained in regard to Coming Daylight: "Her family was well-to-do and showed how much they thought of themselves by giving her a good send-off. You should have seen her going off to her first husband. She was only about ten years old and she looked so tiny leading that big horse. On the horse was a fine fringed saddle and the travois was just piled up with painted parfleshes and other things."

The following account of the marriage of Coming Daylight's daughter shows how the pattern was carried out under changed conditions: "One night when the family returned from a dance they found a letter addressed to the oldest son, Ed, from a man whom he liked, asking for Ed's sister, Gertrude. When his father came in from tending the horses they told him about the proposal and he agreed right away, saying: 'We are still keeping her and she is a big girl. I'm glad this offer has been made.' So a week later they loaded a new buggy with Gertrude's things,—bedding, beds, trunk, sewing machine, etc.,—and her father drove this to the creek where the dance hall was located. Meanwhile Coming Daylight took her daughter to the house of the man who had asked for her and left her there sitting on this man's bed. The groom did not appear at the Grass Dance that evening, even though he

[8] Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 180.

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grandmother while her uncle's wives were making a lodge which they gave to her; then they went back and her new lodge was the sixth in a row, the five others being those of her husband's relatives who habitually camped together. When this husband died, she was claimed by a classificatory brother of her husband's and remained with the same people. This marriage did not last very long and, when her uncle arranged another marriage, again she lived near the man's relatives rather than her own. Since this too was of short duration, she remarried another time and lived in the same lodge as her husband's mother and unmarried brothers, until, at the time the Gros Ventre settled down (after 1883), her husband got a farm of his own and his mother went to live with one of her daughters.

Relations between Co-Wives

Subsidiary wives were known as "helpers" to the senior wife and co-wives addressed each other as "rival," unless they were related to each other and employed the ordinary form of address as "sister."[1] The senior wife distributed the household tasks and the "helpers" were allotted the heavier work, which usually included the procuring of fuel and water. Nevertheless all women were expected to be industrious and the senior wife as a rule enjoyed no more leisure or freedom than the others. In explaining the situation, Cora referred to her mother's experience. "My mother was always that kind of 'helper' but she didn't seem to mind it. After all, there were so many women who were 'helpers' and, as long as they got their work done, it didn't seem to matter who was 'boss' and who was 'helper.' They used to say in fact that some women preferred to be 'helpers' because while doing their jobs like going after water, they would have a chance to get away by themselves for a while—their husbands couldn't keep such close watch over them."

One of the advantages of living in a polygynous household was

[1] The Gros Ventre word for subsidiary wives, *atsd'anhiniya*, although at present sometimes translated as "slaves" as well as "helpers," is etymologically the same as the term applied to younger men who were appointed on ceremonial occasions to act as "waiters" for the principal performers. The term *in'isag*, "rival," was used between co-wives who were not kin.

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said to have been that the wife who was pregnant, whether senior or subsidiary, could be well cared for and was relieved of the heavier domestic tasks until a considerable time after the child was born. Furthermore, the children of all wives were considered equal in status. "As long as a man claimed the children as his own, he treated them all the same way, whether they were the children of older or younger wives." That differential treatment was sometimes accorded children by their father can be seen from the following case, although it is doubtful whether the father distinguished between his daughters simply on account of the relative position of their mothers. Singer, however, implied that it was so in giving the account of her experience: "When I was married as a younger wife to a certain man, he certainly made a difference between my child and that of his older wife. Both of us had girls, but one time, for instance, when I was out getting wood, they threw my little girl right out of the lodge. A neighbor took her in and when I returned this neighbor said to me: 'I notice they don't seem to care much for this little girl.' So after that I would have to take her with me, carrying a heavy pack on my back and dragging my little one along by the arm. Although my husband never let me use a horse, he would put the child of his other wife on the saddle when he was riding, and often he would hold her in his arms when he was around the camp. One of the worst things I had to endure was that when my husband would return from trading at Fort Benton with goodies like candy and fruit, my little girl was never given any and had to stand by and watch the other child eating. Finally it got so bad that my father took his grandchild and raised her. But I must say that this husband of mine was a really mean man."

The general feeling prevailed that sisters got along together more peaceably as co-wives than did "rivals." In any case the sororate was preferred and it was said that parents were better satisfied to send a child-bride into the household of her sister. This attitude was exemplified by Singer's father in the following account which she gave: "I had been given to my sister's husband when I was just a child. It wasn't a real marriage because I didn't stay long enough. I was sent home by him because he thought I would rather play than work, and my sister took up for

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me and he didn't send for me to come back. Not long after that though, my sister died, and her husband's other two wives came after me. I was playing out on the ice when they came and told me they were going to take me back with them. Ignorant as I was, I said I would go, and that I would have to tell my father first. But my father said: 'No. You shouldn't go with them. Those two women are not related to you and they might be mean to you. If your sister were still living, I would see to it that you went back to that man.' So those women said nothing more and I never heard from them or their husband again."

It was also thought that if the older wife were the sister of a child-bride she might be more willing to "protect" her. The husband of so young a wife was supposed to "wait a while" before claiming the marital right, and some men actually did so. Dressed-in-White for instance deferred the consummation of his marriage for over two years after Coming Daylight had been given to him at about the age of ten. Other men were not so considerate, however, and if an older wife tried to delay the procedure it was interpreted as being done not out of jealousy but through fear of consequences to so young a child. The husband alone determined the use of the marital right and such interference as another wife could offer would be only indirect. This is shown in the following account which concerns a woman well-known to both Singer and Coming Daylight. "One night soon after her little sister had been sent to their husband, this woman overheard him say to the girl: 'Make your bed wider, I am going to sleep with you.' Her own bedding was on the opposite side of the fire from that of her sister and she decided to try to discourage her husband from this undertaking. As she had expected, the husband that night covered up the fire so the lodge would be dark. On the sly, however, she was able to poke the fire so it flared out brightly. He got up and dimmed it once more, but again she made it flare. This was repeated several times and once she heard him say angrily; 'Oh, this is such good wood, it burns too well—I wish I could kill it!" Finally to her dismay she heard him whisper to the girl: 'I will take you outside because I can't seem to make it dark in here. You must not scream or cry out though because

587 your sister is alseep.' She was unhappy that her efforts had failed, but of course she didn't dare do anything more."

595 In confirmation of the theory that sisters lived in harmony as co-wives, Coming Daylight said that she and her younger sister had gotten along well together, but the two had some difficulties with a "rival" in one of their marriages. She added that whether wives were kin or not was less important than "the kind of women they were who lived in the same lodge." Cora gave an interesting illustration of the personality factor involved. Her mother once was married to the same husband of both her older and younger sisters. The youngest of the trio knew that their father had rejected her when she was born. The order to abandon the infant had been carried out, and she was found and adopted by a friend of her father's who raised her as his own. Cora said: "My mother and her older sister got along just fine. But the younger one never hit it off with these other two. It seemed like she was always jealous of them and took every chance she could find to get them in bad with their husband. She was kind of 'tricky.' Although as usual they lived in the same lodge, with their husband, she had her meals separately from the other two, she fetched water only for her own use, and on nice days when they sat outside the lodge she put up her shelter apart from theirs. Things were so bad between her and the other two, even after this common marriage was finished and they had separate husbands, that I grew up without realizing that she was my mother's sister. So that is the reason I feel no responsibility for her now."

Sometimes a senior wife of bad disposition made it very hard for a very young "rival," especially if she were in her husband's favor and the subsidiary wife were not. Singer told of one of her experiences with such a "rival." "I was much younger than this woman and she treated me abominably and sometimes she even beat me. One time my father found me crying after this woman had hit me, and he told me: 'You are getting to be a big girl now. You ought not to let her treat you like that. You should fight for yourself.' So the next time this woman pulled my hair, I grabbed her just as though I had turned into a bear, and held her to the ground and almost killed her. Those outside the lodge heard the commotion and someone yelled: 'Tie them together! Tie them

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763 property.[4] Although in the following case ideal conditions did not obtain, the account as given by an old woman illustrates something of the attitudes which prevailed even after the Gros Ventres had settled down. "My husband had been ill. We were very badly off, having nothing to eat and no light, but worst of all my husband had no suitable clothes in which to pass his last moments. A friend of his fortunately came to the rescue, bringing new clothes, food, a fancy new lamp and fuel. A short time after this my husband called to me to come to him and said: 'I have lost life long ago. The only thing I have left is my eyesight. I can see, but I will be leaving you soon. Bring me the bundle my friend has given me.' I did so and as he examined the new clothing piece by piece he said: 'Now I am glad I shall have something to wear. I want you to listen carefully. I don't want you to mourn—we have too many children for that, and they must be cared for. Don't go to your relatives nor to mine. We have been very poor since I have been sick and none of them has even come to see us. I want you to go straight to the home of this man who has given me these clothes. Now I am ready to go.' After my husband [587] died, I did just as he had requested. In spite of all the gossip, I married that man. People were talking about me because that man had at one time been married to a wife of my mother's brother."

764 If circumstances did not permit arrangements to be made before death, as soon as possible after death the corpse was washed and dressed. This office was performed preferably by friends of the [572] deceased since it was not expected of near relatives because "they felt too bad." Should the deceased not own a proper outfit, one was usually somehow provided. Coming Daylight remembered that one time when a small boy was drowned, the child's distracted mother came running to her lodge saying: "I am very poor and my little boy has no good clothes to wear. Will you let me have your little boy's clothes?" Coming Daylight felt so sorry for this woman that she let her have her own son's nicely beaded clothes and moccasins, and gave her a blanket as well. After the body was dressed, they laid it on this blanket in the place of honor at the back of the parents' lodge.

[4] Kroeber, 1908, p. 180, notes that "A man often disposed of his property before death."